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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIAN ORTHODOX BISHOP ARTEMIJE'S FINANCES MAY
RESULT IN HIS SUSPENSION

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A Serbian Orthodox Church committee sent by the Synod to audit the financial accounts of Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic's diocese has uncovered evidence of financial irregularities and fraud. Bishop Artemije's assistant and adviser, Hieromonk Simeon Vilovski has reportedly fled to Greece. The investigation may result in judicial proceedings against SOC members and Bishop Artemije's suspension from office. Patriarch Irinej and the Synod reportedly support the investigation and action against Artemije. Artemije has blamed the charges on a foreign government conspiracy and may attempt to lead hardline political and church groups into a schism by casting himself as Kosovo's savior. This is unlikely to succeed. Artemije's removal from office would most likely be a major positive step forward for the SOC in Kosovo. We will urge the GOK to be ready to welcome more open SOC leaders in Kosovo when the time comes. END SUMMARY.

EVIDENCE OF FRAUD IN THE DIOCESE DISCOVERED

2. (SBU) Gracanica Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic's tenure at the Gracanica Monastery may be in jeopardy due to allegations of financial irregularities. Father Sava Janjic (protect), Hieromonk of Visoki Decani Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) Monastery told us on February 10 that the Serbian Orthodox Synod in Belgrade has sent a church committee to audit the diocese's financial accounts at Gracanica Monastery. According to Father Sava, the committee has discovered evidence of huge and obvious financial irregularities and fraud involving the misuse of donor money. The main culprit appears to be Bishop Artemije's personal assistant Hieromonk Simeon Vilovski, Abbott of Banjska Monastery in Zvecan, northern Kosovo. Simeon left Kosovo for Greece suddenly in the late evening on February 8.

THE SYNOD'S INVESTIGATION: INITIAL REPORTS

13. (SBU) Artemije issued a media release on February 10 announcing the audit but mentioning nothing about allegations of impropriety. Father Sava, however, is receiving information directly from Diocesan Bishop Teodosije Sibalic, who is a part of the investigative committee in Gracanica. (Note: Teodosije is Visoki Decani's Abbott and a long-time foe of Artemije's, and it is an interesting sign of the political currents at play that he was chosen to be part of the investigation. End Note) According to Teodosije, the fraud involves transfers of donors' funds to Simeon's private bank accounts, as well as specific misuse of funds. Sava said he expects the investigation to result in judicial proceedings against Simeon by the SOC and possibly criminal prosecution by the Serbian government. Artemije, however, is also on the hook due to his statements that all financial management in Gracanica and in the diocese was carried out under his responsibility. According to Sava, Artemije is denying all wrongdoing and is blaming the fraud on a "conspiracy by foreign embassies."

NOT HEADING TOWARD A SCHISM; POSSIBILITY FOR REFORM

14. (SBU) Sava told us he expects Artemije's allegations that foreign meddling is the source of the investigation to find support among hardliners in Serbian political and church life. He believes it is likely Artemije may attempt to provoke a schism within the SOC by casting himself as the only bishop willing and able to defend Kosovo as a part of Serbia. Patriarch Irinej and the Synod, however, are supporting the investigation, and Sava does not believe that hardliners will move against Irinej so quickly after his election and given his background as a bishop acceptable to all SOC factions (reftel). The most likely outcome of the investigation, according to Sava, is that Artemije will face suspension from office. While it is unclear what that might mean for Artemije, Sava is already

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predicting an opportunity for real SOC reform in Kosovo.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) Bishop Artemije's story is a sad one. He went from being one of our best and most open interlocutors to a man whose heart and mind seemed irrevocably closed to dialogue. His suspension and removal from office, and replacement by a more open SOC bishop, would constitute a major positive step forward. We know from experience that Teodosije and Sava are open to dialogue and contact with GOK officials and institutions. They want to engage with the broader Kosovo Albanian community. Artemije's departure could open the door for direct contact between SOC clergy and GOK representatives and institutions. We are especially struck by how quickly the new Patriarch and Synod moved after the former's installation. This could provide the SOC with a platform to address a whole host of open issues in Kosovo, such as protection of SOC sites, cultural heritage preservation issues, and an eventual KFOR drawdown. Although the alleged financial crimes appear to have been committed in Kosovo, we believe the GOK would leave decisions as to an appropriate judicial venue and prosecuting authority to the SOC. We will urge the GOK to be ready to welcome more open SOC leaders in Kosovo when the time comes.

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